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Tobacco-Health Study

Tobacco stocks on Wall Street will be bouncing for quite a while. And this will be the only immediate public reaction to the announcement that a government-backed study will be launched this fall of links between smoking and health.

This will be, after all, something like the 247th study of smoking in recent years. Smokers have become hardened to repeated proofs that tobacco damages their health. The weak-willed give up reading, the others plunge right on.

The study will be directed by Dr. Luther Terry, the surgeon general. In selecting the panel of 12 experts, Terry is consulting with medical groups, government agencies and the tobacco industry.

The experts will sift and weight evidence, not engage in research. There is little doubt what they will find. Report after report has indicated that smoking—particularly cigarette smoking—damages health in several highly unpleasant ways.

The second part of their report will be more significant: the recommendations for action. As Secretary of Commerce Hodges has said, "Tobacco touches the economic, social and political life of all Americans."

This has no effect on medical findings, of course, but it inevitably will affect the steps to be taken. The government cannot lightly move to destroy or cripple an \$8-billion-a-year industry. It is a distasteful equation, but economic considerations must be balanced against medical matters.

Ultimately, the individual smoker must make his own decision between his health and his habit. The role of the government study will be to collect and publicize the facts of smoking and health so the smoker can decide on the basis of facts.

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